



“Pain”

Narrative Medicine Workshop Rundown

Description:

This guide is timed for a **1-hour, 30-minute** virtual workshop with **8-10 participants** and includes a short break. It assumes you have already held an introductory “Attention” group and set group guidelines. Adjust your time estimates for groups that are larger, smaller, or of different lengths. Same for in-person groups: adjust timing and exercises as necessary.

Look for facilitator tips, production notes, and sample language throughout to help make your workshop successful. Feel free to copy and paste third objects, prompts, and other exercises from the [Accessible Digital Library](#) into your rundown.

Workshop sections:

WELCOME	<i>~4 minutes</i>
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Guidelines reminder. Introductory note about **pain**, how terms like wellness, illness, healing, and pain are applied differently depending on situation and bias. Who gets to define these terms? Whose pain is believed? Who has agency? Remind everyone there will be a short break midway through the workshop.

WARM-UP WRITE & SHARE	<i>~20 minutes total</i>
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Write #1 (5-6 minutes)

Reflecting on your day so far, think of an animal or tree, some living thing your senses noticed today, something you do not have a conventional language to communicate with. Engage with all the senses available to you and be sure to keep your pen/pencil/typing moving:

- What’s it like?...
- You can’t say it, but...

Share (12-15 minutes)

Give everyone an opportunity to share all or part of their writing aloud. Reminder of privacy, to read without apology or preamble. For everyone else, bring attention to the writing, practice active engagement with what is being shared. If there is a particular word or phrase that stands out to you, write it down for yourself or type it in the chat.



THIRD OBJECT – ENGAGE, DISCUSS, AND WRITE	<i>16-20 minutes total</i>
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For third objects and prompts or exercises that pair best with this workshop, [visit the Accessible Digital Library here](#).

Preface (1 minute)

Before sharing your screen with the third object, encourage everyone to continue the level of active engagement when you shared each other’s words. Encourage them to keep a list of what they notice about the piece, first impressions, words or phrases, their own experience in their body and any emotional reaction.

Engage with third object (5-7 minutes)

Share your screen. If a written work, mimic other workshops and have a participant read aloud and a second volunteer read it again. Whatever the third object, have everyone jot a list for themselves what they notice about the piece, the questions they have.

Discuss (10-12 minutes)

Facilitate discussion about what people notice or respond to, what stands out. Use skills honed in previous workshops. Does everybody gravitate to the same things or different? Was there something you brought to your observation, any aesthetic preference or bias? Was there something familiar that helped you identify with the material, or was there no point of reference? Was anything about the piece difficult or challenging for you? Name it. With the subjects of the third objects in mind, do you recognize elements of **pain** or a **relationship with pain**? Do you notice a tendency to push away and deny pain or do you sit with it? What about the frustration when your pain is dismissed, misunderstood, not believed? What allows for a sense of trust and curiosity and non-judgement when others identify their pain?

BREAK	<i>5 minutes</i>
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While it is nice to stay inside the dream of a workshop, it’s also important to normalize taking breaks. “Powering through” may leave some people behind who have access needs you are not aware of. Encourage people to keep phones and other devices tucked away, but also to stretch their body, use the restroom, grab a snack, and/or do what they need to rest and recharge.



WRITE #2, SHARE, DISCUSSION

~30 minutes total

Write #2 (14-17 minutes)

With the third object still in mind, do another write. We'll begin by first listing out some details. (3-5 minutes). Identify a recent pain. Could be big or small, something unpleasant or uncomfortable in your body, heart, or mind. Spend a moment to focus on where the discomfort was (or still is) and ask that pain or discomfort to identify itself. Give your pain/discomfort a name, a gender, an age. You decide. Write these answer down and some other questions you pose:

- Are you young or old?
- What color or scent best represents you?
- What's your favorite food?
- What do you do to unwind?
- If you could vacation anywhere, where would you go?

With this character you've created in mind, start a dialogue with them. Offer any **two** of these suggested prompts to start (11-12 minutes):

- "Where did you come from?"
- "Can I get you anything?"
- "When did you get into town?"
- "Have any weekend plans?"
- "Can you believe this weather?"
- "Why did you say that?"

Share (4-5 minutes)

Without naming the pain/discomfort, everyone name their character and traits.

Discussion (10 minutes)

Open discussion on the writing/exercise, ways we might talk about or relate to pain in ourselves and others, without judgment, in healthcare settings. Are there ways to recognize our bias and build trust and dialogue around these sensations within ourselves AND with others?

**WRITE #3***5-15 minutes total***Write #3 (3-5 minutes)**

Time-permitting, do a final write. Use prompts inspired by the third object or these suggested prompts:

- It's a new feeling...
- I recognize you now...

Share (2-10 minutes)

You may only have time for folks to share a short write. If you are pressed for time or did a longer write, ask participants to read through and circle a word or phrase that stands out from what they wrote. Share it in the chat so the group ends on people's words.